

Memo

Probable Communist Strategy and  
Tactics at Geneva

19 April 1954

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19 April 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Probable Communist Strategy and Tactics at Geneva

1. In our view, the Communists see in the forthcoming negotiations at Geneva abundant opportunities to improve their position both in Asia and in Europe. They are almost certainly confident that their negotiating position regarding Indochina will be both stronger and more unified than that of the West. They also are aware that the British and French attitude toward Communist China is more flexible than that of the US and probably consider that this divergence of attitude can be exploited, particularly if discussions of China's status as a world power can be tied to the possibilities of a settlement in Indochina. They probably also believe that the establishment of a Korean armistice has created a receptivity among Western nations for a general Far Eastern settlement and that this receptivity broadens their area for maneuver.

2. The chief Communist objectives for the Geneva conference are probably to weaken or disrupt the Western alliance and to establish Communist China as an acknowledged member of the "big

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*Memo for D.C.I.*

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five." The achievements of settlements in Korea and in Indochina, ostensibly the chief purposes of the conference, probably have only secondary importance in the Communist scale of values. The Communists probably see no pressing necessity in either of these local situations for reaching an immediate settlement and are almost certainly not prepared to give up any of the substantial advantages they now enjoy in these areas. On the other hand, the Communists almost certainly do not want the Indochina war expanded, and they probably also will not wish the conference to lead to intervention of the US in the war, either alone or with allies.

3. The Communists probably consider the Indochina question pivotal in the Geneva conference. The Communists almost certainly consider that the keen desire of the French to get out of the Indochina war is the weakest point in the Western facade and offers many opportunities for tactical maneuver. They will therefore seek to exploit the weakness of the French regarding Indochina in order to test the unity and flexibility of the Western bloc. If the Western bloc as a whole demonstrates an inflexibility regarding negotiations for some kind of settlement in Indochina, they will probably undertake largely to create division within the Western bloc through a series of propositions calculated to make France's western partners, particularly the US, appear

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intransigent and determined to reach a military solution in Indochina. On the other hand, if the Western bloc displays some willingness to bargain, the Communists will probably offer propositions involving minor Communist concessions which could lead to an agreement of narrow proportions in Indochina.

4. Specific Communist tactics during the Indochina discussions are difficult to anticipate. We consider it likely, however, that the Communists will either initiate or be immediately receptive to a proposal for a cease-fire in Indochina. The Communists may link the possibility of a cease-fire to Western concessions of considerable magnitude, such as the establishment of a coalition Vietnam-Vietnamese government which would subsequently hold an election, or a division of Indochina at the 16th Parallel. They might include as conditions the withdrawal of French forces from Indochina or recognition of the Ho Chi-minh regime as the sovereign government of Vietnam. On the other hand, the Communists may merely offer a cease fire, with no conditions other than that further conferences be held for arriving at a political solution.

5. We believe that the Communists would be willing to have a cease-fire established in Indochina. Although the three Communist powers - the USSR, Communist China, and the Ho Chi-minh

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regime - view Indochina in different perspectives, none of the three would lose by a cessation of the fighting at the present time. The USSR would thereby advance its present world-wide strategy of lessening tensions and would hope to profit, both in Asia and Europe, by reducing Western vigilance and preparedness. Communist China would thereby reduce the diversion of its energy from its primary interest in domestic economic and industrial expansion. Also, from the Chinese viewpoint a cease-fire of indefinite duration would eliminate the possibility that the Indochina war might become another Korean war, thus involving much heavier diversion of effort, the presence of US forces on China's southern flank, and the risk of expansion of the fighting to China itself. For the Ho Chi-minh regime, a cease-fire would mean a shift in emphasis from "armed liberation" tactics to political warfare tactics in furthering the Communist movement in Indochina. The Viet Minh probably consider that they have attained considerable military prestige among the Indochinese people during the past two fighting seasons and may feel that the time is now ripe to place heavier reliance on political tactics.

6. We believe that the Communists do not consider themselves under immediate pressure to make concessions of any considerable significance during the Indochina discussions. However, if the

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Communists become convinced that direct US participation in the Indochina war is a strong likelihood, their willingness to make concessions will be greater. They might, for example, be willing to make terms for a cease-fire which would permit the French to consolidate their position in the Delta. We believe they will not, however, make concessions representing an abandonment of the Ho Chi-minh regime or the Indochinese Communist movement.

7. Immediate Communist objectives for the Korean discussions at Geneva are probably moderate. They probably hope to bring about a reduction of Western strength in Korea but not to alter the present political division. They will probably attempt to make the Korean discussions revolve around the question of troop withdrawal, and they will almost certainly press vigorously for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, Chinese Communist forces included. If agreement on this point is reached, the Communists will probably be prepared actually to withdraw Chinese forces, believing that North Korean military strength matches South Korean strength and that such withdrawals will bring considerable political advantages to them. The Communists will probably raise or agree to proposals on certain minor matters such as commercial exchange, postal service, and limited movement of persons.

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8. Throughout the conference, the Communists will attempt to achieve at Geneva what they were unable to achieve at Berlin: Western acknowledgment of Communist China as one of the world's "big five." They will employ a variety of tactics, on both substantive and procedural issues, to establish that the Geneva conference is a five power conference, that China has equal status at Geneva with the US, the USSR, the UK, and France, and that China has the right to participate also in "big five" decisions on non-Asian questions. The USSR may attempt to enhance the status of China by assuming a less prominent role in the meetings while allowing the Chinese to come to the fore.

9. Consistent with their declared desire to make Geneva a big power conference on lessening world tensions, the Communists will almost certainly introduce issues extraneous to Korea and Indochina. Such issues may include: "normalization" of East-West diplomatic relations, expansion of East-West trade, reduction of armaments, outlawing of thermonuclear weapons, a proposed Asian Security arrangement similar to that currently being hawked by the USSR in Europe, and the future status of Formosa. Moreover, these issues, together with issues concerning Indochina, Korea, and the status of Communist China, may be packaged by the Communists at Geneva in any of a number of "attractive" combinations.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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HAROLD R. BULL  
Lt. Gen., USA (Ret.)  
Acting Chairman